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PERSONNEL DIRECTOR MEMORANDUM NO. 13-52(a)

SUBJECT: CAMPUS JOB INTERVIEWING

The following article, extracted from the January 1952 issue of Personnel (Published by AMA), is for your information and staff utilization:

## CAMPUS JOB INTERVIEWING: A SURVEY

by

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Many companies resort to direct interviews on the campus to recruit college graduates for their training programs as well as for specific job openings, and this method of recruitment has become even more popular as a result of the present-day shortages of technical and scientific personnel. Presented here are the results of a survey on campus job interviewing which should be of value to companies in appraising their own interviewing techniques and may provide a guide to those organizations which have not previously recruited directly from the colleges.

Campus Job Interviewing is an art—an art practiced by the prospective employer to put the student at his ease, to discuss job and career opportunities, to "size the boy up" as a potential employee. For the future employee, it is the dual art of investigating the company and the job it offers and of selling himself. Two strangers practice the art of stating and asking, of talking and listening, of impressing and being impressed. Such interviews are important—both in terms of successful selection and placement for the company and in terms of a future career and happiness for the student. As a point of contact, then, between prospective employer and employee, campus job interviewing seems worthy of investigation and analysis. Essentially, what are the interview techniques employed? What are the selection criteria? What are the reactions to the interviews? The following report describes the result of a questionnaire survey of interviews held between 33 company representatives<sup>1</sup> and 49 graduating students<sup>2</sup> of the Cornell School of Business and Public Administration, as conducted by the students of the School's personnel seminar.<sup>3</sup>

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### Who Does the Interviewing?

Predominantly, campus interviewing was conducted by practiced interviewers representing staff departments of their companies. Twenty of the thirty-three company men represented personnel, industrial relations, or employment departments, with one coming from the education department. Campus recruiting for another company was done by a management consulting firm. Eleven men came from line departments, with four of them representing their sales divisions.

Staff predominance is even more evident from a review of the job titles held by the various interviewers. In all but five cases, the representative was a staff man. Typical among the job titles were those of Employment Manager, Personnel Director, Assistant Director of Industrial Relations, and even as specialized a designation as Supervisor of College Recruiting. Four of the five other men represented field or branch offices, and bore titles such as District Manager, and in only one case was the interview conducted by a Department Manager. The fact that with but two exceptions all the representatives had more than two years' experience in interviewing, with a median of eight years for the group, emphasizes the staff specialty aspect.

### PREPARATION FOR THE INTERVIEW

#### Were the Students Prepared for the Interview?

Since interviews are greatly affected by the adequacy or inadequacy of interview preparation, a section of the student questionnaire was devoted to the subject of preparation. In answer to a direct question 12 per cent of the students stated that they did not feel that they had adequate preparation for the interview. The remaining 88 per cent believed their preparation had been adequate. This is probably a biased opinion in favor of themselves. This lack of preparation by 12 per cent of the students—which is light of the possibly biased answers actually could well be higher—can be recorded as a hindrance to an effective interview. To what degree this lack of preparation was due to inability to get information, indifference on the part of the interviewee, or lack of sufficient notice of the interview is open to conjecture. Seventy-five per cent of the interviewees had at least one week's advance notice in which to prepare for their interviews. The fact that one-quarter of them had less than a week might have been a reason for the 12 per cent not being prepared for the interview. No effort was made in the questionnaire to determine whether this remaining one-quarter had six days', six hours', or six minutes' notice of the interview. But lack of notice is seen as a possible obstacle to a "good" interview because of its hindrance to adequate preparation.

### What are the Sources of Information about the Company?

The main source used by the interviewees to get advance information about a company was the company literature which had been distributed to the School, the University placement office, and the libraries. Eighty-three per cent of the interviewees obtained information either partially or entirely from this source. Moody's, Standard, and Poor's, and similar publications were a source of information for the other 17 per cent. Many of the students acquired the knowledge of a company from their professors, personal acquaintances, articles, advertisements, personal experience, general knowledge, and correspondence with the company. A few companies held group meetings, prior to the scheduled interviews, at which all the basic information was presented. From all these sources 90 per cent of the interviewees gained information as to the location of the business, 70 per cent learned of the company's products, and 65 per cent learned of the training program. About 60 per cent of the interviewees had advance information about the company's recruitment procedures, the company's organization, and the starting salaries offered. One-half of them knew of the company's benefit plans in advance of the interview, and between 30 and 40 per cent of them had learned of the company's promotional opportunities, marketing structure, and general personnel policies.

### Were the Interviewers Prepared?

Though students may have exaggerated the adequacy of their own interview preparation (and in some cases certainly there was either a lack of information or lack of initiative to secure information), generally it was indicated that students went to their interviews reasonably well prepared. We found that 94 per cent of the students had filled out a company or a Cornell University Placement Service questionnaire prior to the interview.<sup>4</sup> To get an idea of the company representatives' information regarding the basic facts about the students being interviewed, we asked the students whether they felt that the interviewer had read part or all of this information prior to the interview. Only 28 per cent answered in the affirmative. Though this answer may be biased, too, it suggests that 72 per cent of the interviewers took time during the interview to read the questionnaire, read it after the interview, or did not read it at all.

It seems, then, that the interviewer is relatively unprepared for each individual interview in so far as his knowledge of the individual interviewee is concerned. Except in rare cases of previous meeting or correspondence, the student is a complete stranger, and the interviewer is forced to spend the first few moments hastily scanning the submitted written information. The effect this has on the successful interview—use of valuable time for establishing rapport, and impressing the student who has spent hours on his own preparation—is obvious. However, the remedy is not. The interviewer

is on the road for weeks at a time, traveling from campus to campus. He arrives at the Placement Office the morning of the interviews and within 15 minutes is talking to his first stranger, with no time provided for review of his schedule or for scanning the placement questionnaires. Successful interviewing calls for a minimization of this gap in formational communication.

#### Screening of Applicants

An attempt was made to ascertain whether companies pursued the practice of interviewing all interested parties, or instead restricted the interviewee group to those who, for example, ranked in the top quarter or fifth of their class. To the direct question as to whether there was any screening before the interview, 55 per cent replied in the negative, 9 per cent indicated always, 27 per cent claimed that this practice was seldom followed, and the remaining 9 per cent reported that they screened applicants frequently. It appears, then, that though there is limited screening by the company before the campus interview, and though it is felt that the Placement Service does or should do some elementary screening, generally speaking, companies will see all aspirants for their positions.

#### THE INTERVIEW PROCESS

The seminar group was particularly interested in seeking answers to questions about the interview itself. How was it conducted? To what extent was it planned? Was it interviewer or student dominated? Was it a matter of the student answering questions, contributing little--a mild inquisition; or was it a spontaneous, natural, mutually-participative discussion in which the student was given full rein? In personnel terminology, was the interviewer's performance directive or non-directive? To begin with, the overwhelming preference (91 per cent) of the interviewers was for single interviews, one representative interviewing one student as compared to the team interview where two men face the student, or the group interview where one man speaks to a group of interviewees.

#### Was the Student Put at Ease?

In the interview itself it was fairly widespread opinion of the students that the interviewers attempted to make them feel at ease, especially during the introductory moments of the interview. Ninety-two per cent reported this impression. The feeling of ease in the interview decreased to 64 per cent for the entire interview, with 20 per cent considering themselves at ease most of the time, and 16 per cent feeling at ease only part of the time. While such factors as cordiality and manner of speech are difficult to measure by questionnaire, these statistics indicate that the interviewers met the students more than half way in establishing an informal, easy relationship. Moreover, on the assumption that note-taking by the representative during the interview may disrupt the composure of the

student, twenty of the interviewers waited until after the student had left the room before making notes, three interviewers made notations during the interview, and ten did both.

In answer to the question, "Did you pose hypothetical problems to the interviewee in order to judge his ability to think clearly under stress?", eight of the representatives answered "never," thirteen said "seldom," eleven said "frequently," and only one said "always." This does not indicate conclusively the use or non-use of the "stress technique," but it does suggest, particularly in light of the answer to other questions, that most interviewers made little conscious attempt to put the student under pressure. If used at all, it was intended as a "prodger" to get the student talking. This conclusion is supported by student reactions; only ten of the forty-nine students felt they had been under stress at all, and only half of those believe the stress had been purposely induced by the interviewer.

#### Technique of the Interview

Though 58 per cent of the interviews followed a prearranged pattern regarding explanation, discussion, question, and answers, the principal intention was one of "bringing the boy out," hearing his story, questioning, testing his initiative, learning by listening rather than by lecturing. Universally, the interviewers attempted to evoke spontaneous conversation. Seventy per cent of the interviewers volunteered job and company information, but 58 per cent preferred to have the student do most of the talking and 39 per cent preferred to split it 50-50. The fact 33 per cent felt that in the Cornell interviews student conversation dominated, and 58 per cent thought the talking was about evenly divided, supports the tendency, if not the intention, of evoking interviewee participation. One interviewer noted that though both had done about an equal amount of talking, it "should have been interviewee-dominated." Another commented that he tried to attain spontaneous conversation on the part of the student, but "it was hard to get." Still another withheld information until it was sought. On the student side, over one-half felt that conversation had been about equally divided, 29 per cent claimed that the interviewer had done most of the talking and 15 per cent believed that the student had dominated the conversation. The tabular comparison below points up, perhaps, significant differences in the two opinions.

The differences of opinion regarding the respective dominations, 20 per cent in both cases (items 1 and 2 in the tabulation), pose questions of accuracy and objectivity. There is the possibility of both parties understating their roles of domination. However, it seems of greater significance that there should be agreement by a majority of both groups as to the equal division of the talking (item 3 in the tabulation). There is not, then strong indication of dominance one way or the other, but instead a fairly widespread opinion that there is a balance in the conversation. When this balance is viewed with the interviewers' indicated preference that student conversation



dominate, there is added evidence that the interview as a whole is not interviewer-dominated; is not, technically speaking, entirely directive.

TABLE 1

1. The interviews were interviewer-dominated	According to 9 per cent of the interviewers	According to 29 per cent of the interviewees
2. The interviews were interviewee-dominated	According to 33 per cent of the interviewers	According to 13 per cent of the interviewees
3. The interviews were neither interviewer- nor interviewee-dominated	According to 58 per cent of the interviewers	According to 58 per cent of the interviewees

#### Length of the Interview

The company representatives generally agreed, assuming the student had some advance information about the company, that 20 minutes was the optimum time length for a campus interview, usually the first in the selection process. One thought 15 minutes sufficient, twelve favored 20 minutes, four suggested 25 minutes, six thought 30 minutes were necessary, and three favored 40 and 45 minutes. Four did not answer the question. This preference coincides with the actual length of most of the Cornell interviews which is determined by the weight of the interview schedule. Two interviewers used 15 minute periods, nineteen used 20 minutes, five used 25, another five used 30 and two used 40 and 45 minutes apiece.

#### Was the Company Oversold?

It was considered pertinent to ask the student, "Did the interviewer undersell, sell or oversell the company?" Twenty-seven per cent felt that the company was undersold, 69 per cent believed that the company was properly sold, and 4 per cent reported cases of overselling. Realizing that the representative is entitled to describe his company and the training program in terms of opportunity, security, career success, etc., the majority student reaction is only natural. The substantial feeling of underselling, actually reinforced by the minute feeling of overselling, strongly suggests the lack of high-pressure job salesmanship. Though such student reaction may indicate non-directiveness on the part of the interviewer, it must be realized that the present employers<sup>0</sup> (buyers<sup>0</sup>) market could alone be responsible for such reticence.

#### Discussion of Salary

The survey clearly indicated that the company representative generally took the initiative in the matter of salary. This matter was discussed in two-thirds of the interviews, and the representative was the first to mention it in about two-thirds of these cases.

Once mentioned it was usually the representative who first gave an actual dollar figure. Eighty-five per cent of the students reported that they were not asked to suggest a figure, and 76 per cent said that the interviewer specified the actual figure. In most cases, then, the student does not have to worry about suggesting how much he will work for.

#### General Reaction to the Interview

Reactions of the student to the interview as a whole, even considering the instances of criticism, were for the most part favorable. Well over two-thirds of the students were favorably impressed with the company representative as an interviewer. And though half of the remaining third were unfavorably impressed, the other half were undecided. The answers to the question, "In general, what was your reaction to the interview as a whole?" revealed more favorable than unfavorable comment:

Well conducted. He was a personnel man, used to talking with recruits—knew just what to look for.

\* \* \* \*

The interviewer explained the company, its work, and especially its training program very clearly.

\* \* \* \*

Interviewer did a fine job of easing the usual tension present at job interviews. Talked about comparatively irrelevant subjects of mutual interest for first ten minutes or so. Did a good job of outlining position and structure within limits imposed by fact of new company and consequent uncertainties and flexibility. Salary was stated as within a range, with certain additions for extras...which was excellent.

\* \* \* \*

Favorable, effective, good preparation, no pressure, familiar with jobs.

The unfavorable comments referred to lack of knowledge of the company on the part of the interviewer, artificial familiarity, too much questioning about data already contained in submitted application, and too much pressure. Some students reported that the interview was "a waste of time," "poor," and "inconclusive."

The following comment is more extreme than it is typical:

The interviewer was unimpressive, his presentation of the company and the job was poor, and his conduct of the interview was careless and gave the interviewed person the impression that the interview was aimless and designed to accomplish no immediate recruiting purpose.

Whether or not such criticism is, in fact, true is secondary to the realization that the interviewer and the company he represents are also on trial, which is important to good recruiting and public relations.

Essentially the information gathered indicates that the typical interview is non-directive. Though it may follow some sort of pattern as determined by the company representative and though the initiative for getting things under way, for explaining the company and its program, for discussing salary, and for terminating the interview may rest with him, the basic idea is to bring the student out—to give him a chance to express and sell himself. The seminar group believes that there is evidence for this conclusion in the interviewer's attempts to put the students at ease, in his limited but "prodding" use of stress, and in his preference for the single interview. The indicated even distribution of conversation is very significant in this regard. And certainly the generally favorable student reaction to the interview as a whole constitutes a valid contribution to this conclusion.

#### BASES OF SELECTION

##### Factors in Preliminary Selection

An effort was made to determine what factors were of crucial importance in the preliminary selection of the applicant for a job. Interviewers were asked to check, in order of preference, four out of the following list of selection factors: first impressions, personality, appearance, job experience, scholastic achievement, extra-curricular activities, specific abilities, preparation for the interview, and conduct during the interview. Personality was rated as the most important factor and was checked by 85 per cent of the interviewers. Scholastic achievement was a close second and was the choice of 76 per cent. Following closely in order of preference was extra-curricular activities. Appearance and conduct during the interview was rated equally, 46 per cent of the interviewers voting for each.<sup>5</sup>

Judging from the results, it would seem that job experience and initial impressions created by the interviewee were of secondary importance, inasmuch as they had received a minimum of votes. Also rated of lesser importance in the interviewers' estimation was the degree of preparation by the students for the interview.

These general conclusions must be interpreted carefully, however. Though it was the original intention of the investigators to have the interviewers check four factors in order of their importance, many felt that it was practically impossible to comply with this request. Some thought that the four factors they enumerated warranted approximately equal weighting. Others pointed out that the relative importance of the several factors was contingent upon the particular positions for which they were recruiting. For example, in



the fields of public accounting and sales which involved direct contact with clients, the question of personality and appearance was extremely significant—that "technical ability enhanced by scholastic achievement was not usually sufficient." On the other hand, for engineering or research positions, scholastic attainment received greater emphasis. But most important, the interviewers conveyed the idea that the final determination hinged upon the total impression one had received at the end of the interview. In other words, "the well-balanced candidate is sought." It would be "dangerous" to base selection on ratings of specific characteristics.

#### When Are Job Offers Made?

Another aspect of the selection process investigated was the procedure followed in making an actual job offer. When quizzed as to whether job offers were made solely on the basis of campus interviews, only 3 per cent claimed that this was the case. Seventeen per cent indicated that this was frequently true; 10 per cent that this was seldom the case; and 70 per cent stated that their selections were never made on this basis alone. Thus, 80 per cent of the interviewers specified that the job offer process normally entailed further steps beyond the campus interview. Fifty-eight per cent of the interviewers noted that subsequent interviews and a home-office visit were required before a definite job offer was extended. Twenty-nine per cent stated that a battery of tests was administered in addition to further interviews and a trip to the plant. One interviewer commented that offers were made after the candidates from all colleges had been considered; another replied that the additional interview necessary was one with the supervisor of the district or department in which the applicant was primarily interested. In other words, in most cases the campus interview is only the first, if nonetheless critical hurdle in obtaining a definite job offer. In 50 per cent of the cases, definite arrangements were made during the interview for later contact or notification; in the other cases no definite understanding was reached other than the interviewer's statement, "We will get in touch with you later if we are interested."

#### CONCLUSION

This initial survey of campus interviewing leaves some gaps in information and interpretation which can be filled in subsequent surveys. The results are not meant to apply to campus interviewing generally, since they are based only on interviews held at a component school of one university. Also, the results are based on interviews conducted primarily by representatives of large companies who visit campuses regularly and who have fairly well-developed interview techniques.

Most significantly, the type of interview studied here appears to be non-directive. It differs from the normal company interview

when the employee and his supervisor know something about one another and the grounds on which each stands. The subject matter is different, as are the "stakes" and possible ramifications. There is an intangible appearance of equality which vanishes once the student has become an employee far down the line. But at this stage the interviewer seeks an equality of participation, minimizes stress, and seeks a conversation rather than a lecture. The degree to which he has been successful and the areas in which the interview process may be improved, can be inferred from the survey results given above.

- <sup>1</sup>The interviewers represented the automobile, chemical, dairy, and steel industries; insurance and accounting firms; retailers and distributors; rubber, soap, cement, carpet, and linotype manufacturers; and one organization for world peace. Eight were recruiting for specific jobs, seventeen were recruiting for training programs, and the remaining eight were seeking men for combinations of both. The purpose of this survey was explained to each interviewer by one of the seminar students, and the interviewer was asked to fill out and return the questionnaire at his convenience--if possible, before he left the campus. Otherwise, he was requested to return it by mail in the envelope provided. The student questionnaire was similarly handled.
- <sup>2</sup>The average age of the students completing the School's two-year course leading to a master's degree in business or public administration was 25; 75 per cent were veterans. Undergraduate backgrounds of these students varied greatly, though the majority had majored in economics or English. In the School, concentrations in marketing or business management predominated.
- <sup>3</sup>The student committee preparing this report consisted of Edward S. Flash, Jr. (Chairman), Basil Barbis, Ranjit Banerjee, William Haack, Muriel Lochter, and John Rogers. The survey was made under the general direction of Professors Schuyler Hoslett (personnel) and James W. Partner (statistics).
- <sup>4</sup>However, only 23 per cent of these questionnaires were turned into the Placement Office more than three days before the interviews; 43 per cent were turned in the same day as the interview,

though, as indicated above, 75 per cent of the students had been given at least one week's advance notice of the interview. Forty-three per cent also submitted a copy of their own educational and experience resume.

<sup>5</sup>These factors may be considered, of course, as components of the general "personality" factor.